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THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN PINE GROSBEAK IN UTAH

By EDWARD and A. O. TREGANZA

WITH THREE PHOTOS BY THE AUTHORS

THE following may be of interest, as it is germane to Mr. Milton S. Ray's article on the California Pine Grosbeak in *THE CONDOR* of September issue, 1912.

July and August of 1907 brought us our first knowledge of the Rocky Mountain Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator montana*), while we were camping in the Wasatch Mountains at an altitude of 8500 feet. It was our first trip to the higher mountains in search of any material other than the Nutcracker, whose trail we had followed in previous years during early March and April. Hence we were hardly prepared for the abundance of bird life that met us at every turn. We were in a maze of all things new. So the season passed with a goodly number of identifications and a working knowledge of the country from the pussy-willow marshes of 7500 feet to the barren, rocky peaks of the 11,000-foot divide that drops away to the Rockies. While but little was definitely learned this year concerning the habits or the whereabouts of the nesting of *P. e. montana*, each year since, up to and including 1912, we have followed, watched, and noted, with that increasing, tantalizing interest, yet ever hopeful for a more intimate knowledge, this vagrant who crosses our path unawares, always with that seeming disregard of our presence, flaunting in the bright sunshine a sheen of brilliantly illumined crimson or gold, as the color phase may be, only to be lost in the deepening shadows of the conifers.

Many times after a grueling half day, we have wearily dropped to a fallen tree to commiserate on our fruitless search of the morning, meanwhile satisfying the inner man with a whole-wheat slug and its accompanying handful of nutmeats and raisins; when from out of the somewhere, but to us nowhere, we see a shimmer, as it were, of sunshine dropped through the foliage, and there on a nearby conifer is our bird preening; and while we watch this gorgeous display of red and gold, the female in sombre grays and browns, coming unheralded, alights with lowered, quivering body and fluttering outstretched wings expectant of her mate's wooing—a moment or two of lovers' greetings, and they are off over the stony point of the mountain—to their nest?

Almost identical in general observations are our field notes on *P. e. montana*, with Mr. Ray's findings concerning *P. e. californica*, regarding time of breeding, situation of nest, actions and mannerisms of the birds, etc. We, therefore, omit our general field notes of the past years and confine ourselves to a description of one of the three pairs carefully noted and observed this year, thinking to possibly add some little information regarding nest building and mating.

From the field notes of Edward Treganza: *June 21, 1912.*—Today I went up American Fork Creek following an old roadway which led me to a deserted miner's camp, and mine named Iowa Copper, where I found much snow and little signs of new spring growth. Chickadees, Williamson Sapsuckers, Tree Swallows, and Cassin Purple Finches were much in evidence. As I came up to the empty cabin, a House Wren flew out. I entered, to find her home in a small cupboard back of a whisky bottle, but no eggs. While sitting on a box in the doorway to rest, and watch the wren a few minutes, my eye was attracted to a much larger bird which alighted on the roof of the stable, some distance away; resting

there but a moment it dropped to a bare spot nearby, flew back up to the stable roof, then away to some large aspens, carrying in its bill a small twig. That this bird was a female Pine Grosbeak I felt sure, although the distance was too great to be positive. Not allowing my eyes to wander from her, I reached for my binoculars as she hopped from branch to branch with that careless unconcern, in which art these birds are quite proficient. Presently she flew up the mountain side to a large, lone fir standing in a body of small aspens, and I raised my glasses just in time to see that she had alighted within a foot or so of what seemed to be an already well-formed nest. After placing her material, she returned to the stable, then dropped to the bare spot in search of more nest material, as before, continuing to and from her nest in this manner for more than an hour. Then to make myself doubly certain, I made my way up the mountain, and upon climbing the tree, found a nest whose lining was partially completed. The nest was situated in a rather heavy clump of boughs, fourteen feet out on a horizontal branch, and some twenty-five feet from the ground. The female was not at the nest at the time I commenced to climb the tree, but presently returned, alighting within two feet of me, to immediately fly away again, and was seen no more this day.

June 24.—Iowa Copper Mine.—Today while watching a pair of Gray-headed Juncos nest-building, some two hundred yards below the cabin where on June 21 I found the female Grosbeak gathering nest material, I heard, calling at regular intervals, a male Grosbeak; but no bird had yet been seen, although I had looked carefully. Suddenly I realized that something had crossed my vision, and



Fig. 33. HABITAT OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN PINE GROSBEAK, IN THE WASATCH MOUNTAINS, UTAH

my eyes instantly rested on a female Grosbeak sitting on a branch of a dead aspen. Apparently it was their trysting place, for almost at the same moment, the male appeared from somewhere alighting on the same branch some eight feet from the female who squatted with outspread wings and tail, in much the manner of young but fledged birds when being fed by their parents. Both birds commenced and kept up a continual twitter, the male strutting to and fro on the branch, each time drawing a little nearer to the female, and the while making obeisance, bowing the head as low as the feet, and displaying his colors with much grace, until they finally met. The female had not moved since alighting, other than the continued trembling of spread tail and fluttering wings. The male then rubbed his head and neck against the head and neck of the female, several times up and down, then suddenly with open beak she raised her head, the male seizing her by the beak, the two commenced tugging and pulling at each other. The stroking of necks and tugging of open bill of female was gone through with three times,

always with much chattering; then coition; then with continued actions of endearment the male worked himself back to his original position on the limb, some six or more feet away, only to recommence his advances. Three times these actions were performed, then without warning both birds assumed a normal attitude and went as they had come, in opposite directions, the male into the dense conifers about two rods away, disappearing completely, while the female flew high over the tops of the trees fully an eighth of a mile and down to a lower altitude. Neither bird was seen again this day although diligently searched for; nor was there anything in their actions that would indicate that they had a nest



Fig. 34. LOOKING TOWARD THE 11,000 FOOT
DIVIDE, WASATCH MOUNTAINS, UTAH; HOME
OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN PINE GROSBEEK

in the immediate vicinity, as neither bird apparently came from, or went in, its direction. This is the first time I have seen the male of this pair.

June 26.—Iowa Copper Mine.—Today I visited the pair of Grosbeaks, witnessing the same nuptial ceremonies of two days previous, at the conclusion of which both birds departed as before. I then proceeded to the nest, and upon investigation found it completed but as yet no eggs.

June 28.—Iowa Copper Mine.—I found my pair of Grosbeaks still continuing their conjugal relations, and nest still empty.

July 3.—Today I took two boys with me to the cabin of the Iowa Copper, quite sure that by this time a full complement of eggs awaited me, and upon reaching the tree the female could be seen sitting upon the nest. After climbing the tree I was compelled to give the branch on which the nest rested several sharp raps at close range before she flushed; then only did she fly to a neighboring limb, to immediately return to the end of the nest-branch. By leaning far out the nest was seen to contain three eggs. Several attempts to reach them proving futile, another course was decided upon. So returning to the ground I went in search of a dead aspen of sufficient length and strength to take me up to the nest independent of the branch on which it was placed. While in search of such timber I located, in a bunch of young firs, nests of Cassin Purple Finch and Audubon Warbler in course of construction, and Western Robin with four fresh eggs. Snow was here six feet deep. The Y-topped aspen selected proved to be five feet short, but fortunately the crotched top just fitted a crotch in the limb underneath that on which the nest was located. This formed the main support for the cradled platform, made of sawed off branches laid crosswise, and resting on limbs on either side of the supported branch; and a young aspen leaning toward the platform, proved an additional support, for with my weight it bent over sufficiently to allow me to lash the whole mass together, making it quite rigid. During all this time the bird had remained on the nest with apparent unconcern, nor did she move until my hand was within a few inches of her, and then only to a position within two feet of the nest, there to hover with drooping and quivering wings. Then away to a neighboring fir with a call, to meet her mate. Both birds then returned to the tree, the male to immediately depart to another nearby tree, there to be heard but not seen. The female on a branch two feet above the nest, took a position from which she did not move, until I had collected both nest and eggs, then flying to the ground some seventy-five feet away she apparently commenced feeding; but very shortly she took wing across the little creek and around the mountain, to be seen no more that day.

General Remarks.—The total number of nests of this species actually seen and examined, is nine, and covers a period of six years, although several additional pairs of birds have been noted and watched during the breeding season, whose nests could not be located. The nests in all cases have been plainly visible from the ground, as they are not especially small, placed at no great elevation, and with no apparent attempt on the part of the birds at their concealment. The locating of a pair of these birds does not always, however, mean the easy finding of their nest; for they have a very wide range, the male radiating from a quarter to a half mile in all directions. Our trips in quest of these birds have not been of two or three days duration; but of from two to six weeks, and all the ground covered has been carefully worked, so we therefore know that the number of pairs are few and limited in range, being spread over a considerable territory.

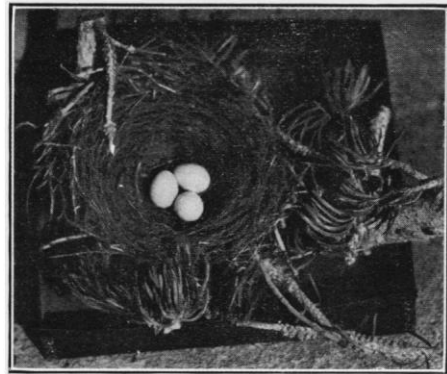


Fig. 35. NEST AND EGGS OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN PINE GROSBEAK; THE MARKINGS ON THE EGGS CONSIST OF FINE BROWN DOTS GENERALLY DISTRIBUTED OVER THE ENTIRE SURFACE, AND ACCUMULATED MOST DENSELY ABOUT THE LARGER ENDS

The nests, with one exception, have been placed on horizontal limbs of a distance of from five to fifteen feet out from the trunk of the tree, and from seven to thirty feet high. On July 15, 1907, a nest containing young just hatched was found placed about seven feet up, and in, next to the body of a small, gnarly, dead spruce, with the stub of a limb and a few small twigs the only support. In all cases the nests have been composed of the same materials, and alike in structure. From a hasty glance they seem light and flimsy; but as a matter of fact, they are quite compact. The small under platform does not exceed much in size the nest proper, or heavy lining, and is built of the small dead twigs of the mountain maple, willow, or pine, according to location. On top of this is placed coarse weeds and straws, into which is worked a fine, wire-like weed, of the previous year's growth, until finally the lining proper consists of this weed altogether. It is quite remarkable how dense and well conformed this stiff and brittle wire-like weed becomes. Of course at the time the nest material is gathered it is still damp, and flexible; for it is secured from the few spots here and there that are bared of the snow on the sunny exposures. Invariably the nesting site chosen is in a lone tree on the edge of the timber, on or near the point of a mountain always having a good outlook.

The earliest date of the finding of a completed nest is May 25, the latest July 1. The laying of eggs is commenced from two to ten days from the time when the nest is completed. Three seems to be the common complement; in one instance, only, was a nest found containing four young. The earliest date of the finding of young in the nest is July 12, then about three days old. The latest date is August 20, with young ready to fly. Upon inquiry at several of the mines which continue work throughout the entire winter, we are told that this Grosbeak is a constant resident. The elevation of these mines varies from 7,000 to 8,500 feet.

NOTES ON SOME MESA COUNTY, COLORADO, BIRDS

By EDWARD R. WARREN

THE LAST of April and first half of May, 1912, I spent in western Mesa County, Colorado, collecting. Some birds not before recorded from the County were collected, and some observations made on other species are herewith recorded. The only list we have of Mesa County birds is Rockwell's "Annotated List of the Birds of Mesa County, Colorado," in *THE CONDOR*, July, 1908. The first portion of my time was spent at Mack, ten miles east of the Utah line, and the latter part at the Sieber Ranch, on Little Dolores Creek, twenty miles westward from Grand Junction.

Tyrannus verticalis. Arkansas Kingbird. First seen near Mack, April 26, and others the first week in May. Also seen at Sieber Ranch May 12, and common in the town at Grand Junction, May 15-16.

Tyrannus vociferans. Cassin Kingbird. Common at Sieber Ranch May 10-14, decidedly outnumbering the preceding species at this place. I have mentioned these two species, as my friend Rockwell seemed a little in doubt about their relative abundance and distribution, and any additional records will help clear the matter up.

Empidonax griseus. Gray Flycatcher. Two were collected near Mack, April 24 and 26, and one at the Sieber Ranch, May 10, the first record for the County.